

# VERSES

BY B.E.BAUGHAN

G. I. Banks  
June 1907.

Dorothea.

from  
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25. II. 22.



# VERSES

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1898  
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By

B. E. BAUGHAN

Westminster

ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & CO

1898

BUTLER & TANNER,  
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,  
FROME, AND LONDON.

MY thanks are due to the Editors of "The Author," "The Speaker," and "The Literary World," for permission to republish certain of the pieces now appearing in this volume.

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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
FEBRUARY . . . . .	7
SPRING'S CHORISTER . . . . .	8
AN INQUEST . . . . .	11
GOLDEN-MOUTH . . . . .	14
SING HAPPILY . . . . .	16
DEATH-IN-LIFE . . . . .	18
THE SUMMONS . . . . .	19
TO NIGHT . . . . .	20
FIVE PRAYERS . . . . .	22
CHURCH . . . . .	24
FORGIVEN . . . . .	25
SAINT MARGARET . . . . .	26
IRELAND . . . . .	34
TRAFALGAR SQUARE . . . . .	35
SPRING IN LONDON . . . . .	36
THE TERRACE . . . . .	38
DIVES AND LAZARUS . . . . .	39
RENAISSANCE . . . . .	42
DETHRONED, RETHRONED . . . . .	46
TWILIGHT BY THE SEA . . . . .	48

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
A MARCH EVENING . . . . .	50
GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY . . . . .	54
BARBARA . . . . .	57
THE POOL AND THE KINGFISHER . . . . .	59
NAXOS . . . . .	61
LUSTLEIGH CLEAVE . . . . .	62
THE ISHMAELITE . . . . .	63
THE NEIGHBOUR . . . . .	66
HOME . . . . .	69
THE FIRST NIGHT . . . . .	70
THE FIRST MORNING . . . . .	71
COTTAGE DAYS . . . . .	72
TO LIFE . . . . .	80
THE BRINK OF BATTLE . . . . .	81
PEBBLES . . . . .	84
HILL DUTIFUL . . . . .	86
LIGHT AND NIGHT . . . . .	91
THE BRIAR ROSE . . . . .	95
COMFORT . . . . .	100
A NORTHERN MÆNAD . . . . .	101
THE UNKNOWN QUEST . . . . .	105
NEREIA . . . . .	107
LEON . . . . .	128

## FEBRUARY

THE waters awake at last, and the tawny  
meads grow green ;

Clouds run over the sky, and the air is wild  
with glee.

Who can doubt for a minute what all the stir  
may mean ?

The Thrush goes flying up to the top of the  
poplar-tree,

With a "Spring ! Spring ! Spring !

Pretty bird ! Pretty bird ! Pretty bird !" sings he.

Brave little points of palm begin to twinkle and  
gleam ;

Frolicsome catkins volley gold-dust over the lea.

Earth is busy forgetting her weariful winter  
dream,

## FEBRUARY

And loud and louder sings the Thrush, high up  
in the poplar-tree,  
With a "Pretty bird ! Pretty bird ! Pretty bird !  
Spring ! Spring ! Spring !" carols he.

## SPRING'S CHORISTER

SPRING sang a song, and sang it me

Right glad was I to hear it !

It set my heart from chillness free,

And gloriously did cheer it.

Then said sweet Spring

To me, "Now sing

An answer, shall come near it."

Therewith I did a song essay,

Brimming with blithest gladness,

But ah ! my voice (alackaday !)

Still echoed Winter's sadness ;

Well might I try—

Came never nigh

That song's bewitching madness.

Then as against a tree I leant,

And o'er my song was sighing,

## SPRING'S CHORISTER

Came to me for my solacement  
Some pretty bird a-flying ;  
Flew round and round  
Above the ground  
Where yet the snow was lying :  
  
Flew in and out the branches bare,  
Whose arms kind Spring was filling  
With baby sunbeams : everywhere  
Flew, flitted, flutter'd, trilling  
Out of his throat  
A little note,  
That thro' my heart went thrilling,  
  
Till, looking up, " O Spring ! " I said,  
" Mute must I stand, confessing  
My human dulness. Take, instead  
Of mine, this singer's blessing—  
In lightsome flight,  
And song's delight,  
Thy very self expressing ! "

## AN INQUEST

BUMBLE'S dead! the young Grass springs,  
Deep in blue a Laverock sings,  
Violets nestle 'mid the lines  
Of the bold bright Celandines,  
Willow her golden goblet spills,  
And puffs of airy wine distils,  
Almond-scented and honey-fed ;—  
Bumble's not asleep, he's dead!

Dear big beautiful brown Bee,  
What hurt you? Let me look and see . . .  
Thighs, and breast, and head and back—  
No! There's not the slightest crack  
In these greaves of burnish'd brass,  
In this velvety cuirass,

## AN INQUEST

Or all this plated gossamer  
Of wings that wont to whirr and whirr.  
You burly hoplite, what went wrong  
In a panoply so strong?  
Your golden collar is in place,  
These great eyes visor yet your face,  
Your broad sash is not push'd awry.  
Bumble! How did you come to die?

Ah! what's this lolling from your lips,  
This bronzed shaft with two fine tips?  
Bumble! and does the wind sing true?  
He sings a shocking tale of you!  
Of willow-wine, and helpless drouth,  
And one poor greedy tippling mouth!  
And, then, this tell-tale tongue! what needs  
More witness? Plain, I fear, *that* pleads  
"Guilty!"



## AN INQUEST

Laverock's carols fail,  
The young Grass looks very pale,  
Willow quivers, shivers, sighs,  
Celandines turn up their eyes,  
Violets droop the ashamed head—  
O poor Bumble! And you're dead!

## GOLDEN-MOUTH

OUT of the streets I went my way  
One grey-ey'd January day.  
Suddenly, as I stroll'd along,  
A wayside throstle burst out in song.

Long, long months my weary mind  
Had conn'd the griefs of humankind;  
Care had had my heart to school,  
And sear'd it with her iron rule.

But oh! what's this—this strange unrest?  
Is the heart turning in my breast?  
Oh, mercy! is it joy or pain  
Lets the tears rush into my eyes again?

## GOLDEN-MOUTH

And are these wings, my spirit feels?  
And are wings growing at my heels?  
Something touches me! something gleams!  
The air is quick with resurgent dreams!

For, "Love! Love and Life! Oh, back to you!  
Trouble's a lie, but ye are true!"—  
Now, praise and thanks to my brother the bird—  
This was he singing; this I heard!

## SING HAPPILY

I HEARD a Robin from a leafless tree

Sing happily.

A meagre bird in sober suit was he,

Singing a carol of surpassing glee.

Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily !

No furtive sun hearten'd the heavy sky,

(Sing happily !)

December's churlish wind push'd roughly by,

Earth lay a-dreaming deep with upclosed eye.

(Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily !)

## SING HAPPILY

A poor wan world, with wintry grief forspent,

(Sing happily!)

Wherein no faintest voice responsive lent

This lonely singer its encouragement.

(Sing happily, Robin, Robin, happily!)

He sang ; and after every mellow trill,

Sung happily,

He paus'd ; as tho' at heart retracing still

Each utter'd rapture to its inmost thrill,

Oh ! happily, Robin, Robin, happily !

He felt no solitude, no chill distress ;

(Sing happily!)

Sipping at his own song's deliciousness,

He needed nought, his rich estate to bless.—

Sing happily, Poet, Poet, happily !

## DEATH-IN-LIFE

AWHILE ago I lay down in this place,  
Hard by the summit of a heathery hill.  
The Autumn afternoon was very still,  
All things seem'd melting into sunny space.  
I lay long, looking in the sky's dear face,  
Wearing my heart away with prayers, until  
Nature releas'd me from my weary will,  
Gave me sweet Death-in-Life.

O sovereign grace!  
Gone is the misty question, "What am I?"  
No part of me but in the sunlight shares.  
I am become a morsel of blue sky,  
A breath among the slowly-sauntering airs,  
A tuft of heather, rooted where I lie—  
Anything, save a creature that hath cares!

## THE SUMMONS

“LEAVE the broad sunshine, and the pleasant  
plain ;

Seek thou the o'erclouded height !”

Great was the voice that call'd. I rose, and went  
Out from the light

That makes the happy valleys laugh ; I left

Glad homes and children's prattle all behind ;  
And, climbing up the hillside, a sheer cleft,  
Pine-clad and dark, did find.

What mystery Divine, what unknown calm  
Made awful that dim air !

Twilight's deep wings, laid tenderly above,  
Held silence there.

Birds in the valley caroll'd. I lay still.

Vague stirrings of some giant soul possess'd  
My soul with its vast Life's tumultuous thrill—  
How much more sweet than rest !

## TO NIGHT

WRAP me round with thine arms, O Mother!  
Take my head to thy dim, deep bosom,  
Dark and mighty Mother of mine.  
Rest me a moment—I am tired,  
Mother mine!

These dull tears that keep welling, welling,  
Kiss them back! And this hard, hot forehead,  
Calm and patient Mother of mine,  
Let thy cool palm soothe and loosen,  
Mother mine!

This heart-aching, these cares, this weakness,  
Draw them off—they are harsh and heavy,  
Dewy-handed Mother of mine!  
Lave me in purity, lap me in freshness,  
Mother mine!



## TO NIGHT

Sing, now ! Open my spirit's portals  
Wide ; all the bustling thoughts lure outward,  
Dulcet-breathing Mother of mine !  
With melodious quiet lull me,  
Mother mine !

Sow the dear dreams thick on mine eyelids,  
Fold my face in thy neck—O Mother,  
Strong and tender Mother of mine ;  
I am thy child, and thou art my Mother,  
Mother mine !

## FIVE PRAYERS

TO taste

Wild wine of the mountain-spring, fresh, living, strong,  
Running and rushing like a triumph-song  
Round hearts new-braced :

To smell

A growing cowslip, some glad morn of Spring,  
And breathe the breath of every fragrant thing  
From every bell :

To touch

A sliding wavelet, supple, smooth and thin,—  
Just ere the pois'd and perfect crests begin  
To bend too much :

## FIVE PRAYERS

To hear

Amid May twilight, by the murmuring sea,  
Some blackbird warbling from a budded tree,  
Tender and clear :

To see

Down young rose-petals how the deepening  
light  
Glides gradually, till, somewhere out of sight,  
What light must be!—

O Thou, intense

Rapture of Beauty! All-pervading Lord!  
Is not this worship? So art Thou ador'd  
By every sense!

## CHURCH

THE people bent above their books,  
And sweetly pray'd the priest,  
My heart stay'd frozen by their fire,  
And fasted at their feast.

But where the lonely breezes blow  
Above the lonely sod,  
Where mountain-heads are hid in mist,  
My heart was hid with God.

## FORGIVEN

O BLISS too exquisite for song !

I am at peace, my pain is past.  
For Nature, holy, sweet and strong,  
Hath drawn me back to her at last.

Mother ! Loose not thy dear embrace  
From thy poor passionate child again !  
I could not even dream thy face  
In that wild agony of pain.

But, now !—The clouds are roll'd away,  
The moon looks lovingly from Heaven.  
Thousands of tender voices say,  
“ Rest now, poor soul ! Thou art forgiven ! ”

## SAINT MARGARET

JUST ere the swell of the down is broken  
Sheer by the sea cliff, sky and air  
Brood o'er a farmplace bleak and bare,  
Where the wind is master ; and this is his token—  
Two writhen trees, and no more, are there.

You might call it God-forsaken, only  
Within her white-wall'd chamber lies  
Margaret, gazing thro' the skies,  
Or past the sweep of the upland lonely ;  
Margaret, with the grateful eyes !

## SAINT MARGARET

With yonder harebells, pure and pale,  
How gentle is the rough down made!  
Yet ere October they must fade . . .  
—There's another flower, more fair, more frail,  
Will first upon God's knee be laid.

And ah! the wheat has finish'd turning  
Her waves of green to waves of gold,  
Rich light is swimming round stalk and fold,  
The fields with a ruddy joy are burning  
—And all the August suns are told.

Already the mellow mists do creep  
Upon the pasture, soft and slow.  
The air they soothe with dreamy glow,  
The sky they lull to tranquil sleep  
—And Summer steals away, tiptoe.

## SAINT MARGARET

The noon-sun's finger turns the moss  
A-bask on the barn-roof, golden-green ;  
The ricks are bright with paly sheen ;  
The treetops rustle not, nor toss ;  
All is silent, still, serene.

Only the swallows flit and flicker  
Rapidly, rapidly, round and round,  
Now fanning the straws on the court-yard  
ground  
With smooth down-swoop, now quicker and  
quicker  
Pulsing up with a strong rebound.

Margaret, at her window lying,  
Studies this ripening world outside,  
This book before her open'd wide ;  
Looks for help in this strange pass—Dying ;  
Sees ; and lies there, satisfied !



## SAINT MARGARET

The wise words in the printed books  
Dazzle her mind, till it cannot see ;  
A simple, ignorant girl is she ;  
But, here, in Nature's heart she looks,  
And finds there—God, immediately.

God smiles at her in the austere sweet gloaming  
That muffles the feet of the coming dawn ;  
God's hand smoothes out the fair long morn ;  
God rides the waters, thro' all their roaming,  
And hangs the cool stars over the corn.

'Twas God that bade the downs outspread  
All their heart to the large-ey'd sky.  
—In ceaseless worship do they lie  
With ever His puissance overhead  
Mirror'd in their humility :

## SAINT MARGARET

For, when the sun is over-brimming  
Heaven's chalice of profoundest blue,  
The downs run o'er with rapture, too ;  
Their russet cup hath a golden rimming,  
And Glory swings in the grass like dew :

But the grey clouds, with their daylong weeping  
Droop o'er lonely stretches vast  
With mute mournfulness o'ercast—  
Till Comfort on amber wings comes leaping  
Out of the evening sky at last :

And when, thro' folds of violet cloud  
Steals forth a vague pathetic sense,  
Like some hid grief's half-evidence,  
The downs, like one to patience vow'd  
Wait, in a sober, meek suspense :—

## SAINT MARGARET

Till Margaret, o'er the page God-given  
Musing with love-illumin'd mind,  
Reads this amid the lettering twined :  
“ As the look of the downs to the look of heaven,  
My will to Thine, Lord, be resign'd ! ”

—Often the bees' low song, enwove  
With sunbeams and warm clover-scent,  
Floats in, a balmy murmurment,  
That laps her in a sense of love,  
An idle sense of blank content :

Till down the quicken'd air comes pouring  
Ecstasy, rapture infinite !  
Her eyes flash open, wet and bright.  
“ Oh ! can you see Him in your soaring ?  
Skylark ! I wish He were in sight ! ”

## SAINT MARGARET

Or she will gaze where, far away,  
Clasp'd in an amethystine zone,  
The sea and sky melt into one.  
"Something's behind that!" she will say,  
"And *there*, I think, must be His Throne."

By day she watches, fair and smooth,  
The amethyst sea-water shine;—  
By night she hears its voice, benign,  
Mighty, a voice to calm and soothe.  
"Father!" she murmurs, "sure 'tis Thine!"

But when the stars come too, and sing  
Strange, high hymns, and wingèd beams  
Troop in to vigil round her dreams,  
One cry all thro' her heart doth ring:  
"God! Thou art everywhere, it seems!"

## SAINT MARGARET

Ah, love! Let others reach salvation  
Thro' tears and consciousness of sin;  
God hath His way each heart to win.  
Nature He made thy Revelation,  
Held out her hand, and led thee in!

## IRELAND

LAND of the hidden sun,  
    Poor land of pensive skies,  
—Between whose long grey lids  
    Glide out long golden eyes :

Land of tyrannic cloud,  
    —Betray'd by peeping blue,  
Where, from her huddled rags,  
    The native Heaven laughs thro' :

Land of drear noons, with roof  
    And quaking walls of rain,  
—Issuing on royal eves,  
    Pure fire without one stain :

God spread and spread thy light,  
    God thrust thy clouds apart,  
Land of the tear-fill'd eyes,  
    Land of the laughing heart !

## TRAFALGAR SQUARE

STRONG isle of stillness 'mid a roaring Sea !

Like some great Queen thy solitude doth stand,  
Deigning with quiet majesty and grand  
To front these wild waves of Humanity.

How proud a privilege is granted thee !

All round thou see'st the mighty flood expand,  
Hear'st its hoarse voice of thunderous com-  
mand,

Know'st all its power ; yet from that power art  
free !

Man's joy, Man's woe, his hunger and his wealth,

For ever art thou contemplating these ;  
Yet still thy fountains fill the air with health,  
Above the glaring pavement dream thy trees.

—Could but my soul, herself as free from strife,  
As fully face each fact of human life !

## SPRING IN LONDON

THERE'S one that calleth in the street,  
Merry of voice, named Wickedness.  
And many a man will push and grope  
His way towards a sound so sweet.  
—Later, the sense thereof no less,  
He hears : “ There is no Hope ! ”

One croucheth by, fordome with woe.  
All know her—she is Suffering.  
The winds wax clammy cold as Death,  
While, shuddering, thro' her rags they go.  
Sharp her unsobbing voice doth ring :  
“ There is no Hope ! ” she saith.



## SPRING IN LONDON

Day after day, and night by night,  
Upon me, sitting all alone,  
Beats the double desperate cry.  
Till champion Faith is put to flight,  
And 'mid my fences overthrown,  
"There's no Hope!" mutter I.

—So last night. . . . But to-day, to-day,  
Each pool in the street is an eye of blue,  
Buoyant with Spring is the smoky air,  
And a girl sells daffodils, over the way.—  
Why should not everything come new?  
Thank God! Hope's everywhere!

## THE TERRACE

*"Mentem mortalia tangunt."*

THE Terrace is full of sun,  
And holds warm air.  
Invalids, day by day,  
Take refuge there.

Here stands one in his prime,  
And begs for breath.  
Yonder a fair girl walks  
In step with Death.

Children move here on crutches ;  
Some, not at all.  
None are too grown to be ill,  
And none too small.—

—Among the dying babies  
And dying men,  
The merry crocuses bloom ;  
Spring's back again !

## DIVES AND LAZARUS

I WANDER thro' the streets, and see  
The poor man and the rich ;  
But I am sure that God alone  
Knows rightly which is which.—

—There was an old man once, who bore  
A tray of wither'd fruit ;  
It snow'd ; and people hurried by,  
Deaf to his quavering suit.

Last, by a lit wide-window'd shop  
With doubled prayers he plied  
One who, alas ! like all the rest  
Unheeding, pushed inside,

## DIVES AND LAZARUS

Where the pinch'd face against the glass  
Might watch him fling down gold  
For a few flowers, that all would be  
Dust ere the week was old.

Then turned the beggar to the cur  
That shivering by him stood:  
"Ay, Mick! yon lad has gold for flowers;  
We haven't pence for food!"

But ah! those instant-lifted eyes,  
How loving, patient, true!  
Till Love in those down-cast cried out  
"Right, friend! I *have* got you!"

—He of the rare load, coming home,  
Upon a cold still bed  
Cast it, with tears. He, too, had had  
One friend. She lay there, dead.

## DIVES AND LAZARUS

—I wander through the streets, and see  
The poor man and the rich,  
And sure I am that God alone  
Knows rightly which is which!

## RENAISSANCE

WHAT strange device is this of Fate's, that thou,  
Being such, in such a time, to such an earth  
Art born, O damsel of the unruffled brow?  
Sure, in a stately age long-past, thy birth  
Must have made glad some lordly palace-pile  
In some far dreamy city of the South,  
Whose languid grace yet lingers in thy smile  
And curves the corners of thy pouted mouth,  
Sunbeams less shy than ours have kiss'd that  
    cheek

Into its changeful almond-petal bloom,  
And play'd their mazy game of hide-and-seek  
'Mid those crisp tresses; till a sudden doom  
Fasten'd them there, for ever to abide,  
To lave thy brow in floods of radiant light,  
Or soft adown thy shoulder's dimpled side  
Dance out a dazzling brede of gold and white.

## RENAISSANCE

—Yea, cloistered round with old red crumbling  
wall,

On marble steps methinks I see thee stand,  
Erect and gracious, young and fair and tall,  
Holding sweet purple violets in thy hand!

Yet as I gaze, rejoicing,—ah, behold!  
Is there not spread a warm blue sky afloat  
Above thee, and beneath thee? From the gold  
Of those rough-rippling locks, thy dulcet throat,  
All lilywhite and clear, leans yearningly  
Along the blue; thy face is full of dreams,  
Pensive, mysterious, very sweet to see!  
And, thro' the bright air flashing brighter beams,  
Lo! from each pure-curv'd shoulder a white  
wing

Upleaping, for a veil that thou mayst spread  
Before thy face, in that high communing  
When God's own voice rings round thine awe-  
struck head.

## RENAISSANCE

Star-bright thou standest on the sapphire floor,  
And, floating round thee cloud-like, soft as love,  
Fair many-folded raiment eddies o'er  
Thy white feet, lifted as in act to move.

I know thee now! Thou art that angel dear  
Whom Perugino saw, so long ago,  
And never tir'd of limning. Prison'd here  
Thou art, in this deep dungeon-world of woe,  
This dreariness, that men call daily life.  
Alas! thou hast forgone thy visions blest.  
Where are thy wings? Like us, with sin, with  
    strife,  
Like us with littleness, thou art oppress'd!

Fate! Shall I bless or curse thee, who ordain'd  
So dim a setting for a gem so rare—  
Made woman of an Angel, yet retain'd  
The Angel's halo in the woman's hair?



## DETHRONED, RETHRONED

THE pride of rooted majesty,  
The splendid pride of lordliness  
Stamp'd with the right imperial die—  
Most royal in adversity,  
Most radiant in distress—  
To-day beside the sea-waves wild  
I found it, in a beggar-child.

She sings upon the beach for hire ;  
The vivid mirth across her face,  
Her Creole eyes of night and fire,  
The boldness of her bright attire,  
Daily suffuse the place ;  
Light the dull ground, re-light the air,  
And lure a ring of gazers there.

To whom she croons a curious strain,  
Lawless, outlandish, eerie, sweet ;—

## DETHRONED, RETHRONED

Not till she ends that wild refrain  
Her thralls can catch their breath again,

And feel their bosoms beat.

So every day, with merry din,  
Her revenues come clattering in.

And yesterday they did not fail

But ah ! to-day Dolores found  
A stranger, squalid, gaunt and pale,  
Screaming a scrannel ditty stale

On her peculiar ground.

And just as thickly stood the ring  
To hear the newer singer sing !

Then 'mid the ring, with face unstirr'd,

With unabash'd considerate mien,  
Leaving the whisper'd jeers unheard,  
Appraising but the sway preferr'd,

Stood she, the cast-off Queen ;  
Nor claimed again her wrested sway,  
But listen'd—look'd—and turn'd away.

## DETHRONED, RETHRONED

And climbing a near stairway steep,  
There, O the wonder! poised elate,  
With eyes that danced, and yet were deep  
With secrets that they scarce could keep,  
Alone, aloft, she sate;  
And with serene contentment view'd  
Poor rival and fond multitude!—

—She sees her gold and purple gay  
Its undull'd flutter round her make;  
She hears, within, her music play  
Unmarr'd—and her whole soul can say,  
“It is but a mistake!  
Tho' at her feet my pennies fall,  
I am the *right* one, after all!”

## TWILIGHT BY THE SEA

ABOVE the weary world is spread  
A sky of gentle grey,  
And Eve's unhasting footstep creeps  
Across the quiet bay.  
The waves along the beach  
Plash ever, each on each.

The cliff's defiant brow takes on  
A tenderer look ; the wail  
Of the wild sea-birds dies away ;  
Sleep folds her gradual veil  
Earth's tired eyes around,  
But still the seawaves sound.

## TWILIGHT BY THE SEA

The daisies purse their petals up,  
The lambs to shelter creep;  
Man, putting off his toil, puts on  
The nothingness of sleep.  
Still, still upon the shore  
The waves their music pour.

Deep grows the dusk. You cannot see  
One crest or column shine.  
Yet still the unceasing voice on voice  
Attests the unending line  
Of homebound waves that come  
Surely and safely home.

Ay, waves so many! and not one,  
O'er trackless leagues and vast  
By nature sent to seek the shore,  
But finds the shore at last!  
—God! God! would men were free  
With no less liberty!

## A MARCH EVENING

THE night steals down upon the sea,  
Mystery unto mystery.  
So late? And we are due at home,  
Rover, ere night be fully come!  
Whew! Bitter blows the wind and shrill,  
As we turn inland, up the hill  
With its one cottage—snug, no doubt,  
Inside, but grim and grey without;  
Save where yon line of light shoots thro'  
The good green shutter, half-pull'd to  
On father's meal and tiny prayers  
Said in the warmth to-night downstairs;  
God bless them!

Ay, but does *she* wait,  
Quit fire and lamp, and sigh, "He's late!"  
To the cold pane? Come on, lad!

## A MARCH EVENING

Here

Glimmers our path, still vaguely clear,  
The little rutted chalky way  
That none, I'll warrant, all the day  
Has trod, save us. On either hand  
The dim, pathetic downs expand,—  
Patches of wan and whiten'd green,  
Or purple where the plough has been,  
And tawny hillocks. Not a sound,  
Save, somewhere rustling near the ground,  
A homeward lark; and, far behind,  
A great voice vanquishing the wind—  
The Sea's.

All else is near asleep.

No daring star makes shift to peep  
Twixt these wild massy clouds that fly  
So fast along the pallid sky.  
Only the lighthouse beacon streams  
Athwart the night in two bright beams  
That lonelier make the dark.

## A MARCH EVENING

Ah—hush !

What moved? What's all that sudden rush  
Of something white—can those be lambs?  
They glimmer 'mid their scarce-seen dams  
Like baby-ghosts. . . . And now a warm  
Sweet whiff of hay . . . the half-way farm  
Must be at hand ; but where's the light?  
Ah, there. . . . And now 'tis past. The night  
Is on us. The black world around  
Lies steep'd in loneliness profound.  
We plod a mile, and do not speak.

. . . A stinging scud of rain! And bleak  
And bleaker comes the wind, with whirls  
That choke one, and wild whoops and skirls  
Worrying one mad. . . . How foolish! Yet  
You, too, begin to whine and fret,  
Rover! What is it? Just the storm?  
Or can you scent some fiendish form



## A MARCH EVENING

Prowling ahead? Get on! you slink  
Too close. Now, were we near the brink  
Instead of safe inland . . . What! Hark! . . .  
One's ear is dull'd by all this dark. . . .  
Can that be—surf? . . .

. . . The night so black—  
The cliff-track for the homeward-track—  
Death in the dark, and no farewell—  
My God! . . .

Look! look! the hideous spell  
Breaks! Ay, lad, bark and run! All's past!  
Home and the lodestar face at last,  
The lifted lamp, the door held wide;  
“My dearest!” and the night's outside!

## GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

THE cart is ready ; come ! . . . Oh, is it true ?

Gaffer, dear Gaffer, can't you hear me cry ?  
Must the old place call out, instead of you,  
" Good-bye " ?

Ah, sure, 'tis only market-day at Shere ;  
We've only tuck'd you in all snug to go  
With Polly that you've harness'd, Gaffer, dear. . . .  
No ! no !

Never again you'll yoke her at the door !  
Never, but this once, take the market-track !  
And oh ! you'll never, never any more  
Come back !

## GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

. . . You're all alone. Tho' we trudge on beside  
    (All of us but poor Pincher), one by one,  
And Granny often stumbles : yet you ride  
                                Alone.

. . . *You* need no gaiters, tho' the roads be mire ;  
    Your old blue cloak's at home, despite the rain ;  
We needn't be afraid you'll ever tire  
                                Again.

. . . 'Tis market-day, we're all for Shere, and yet  
    There's not one word among so many souls.  
But, straight ahead, a bell one can't forget  
                                Tolls, tolls. . . .

Stop, yon's the village ! Lay the holly-greens  
    Upon the lid . . . lift him . . . with bated  
        breath  
Bear him along, and reverence ! Oh, this means  
                                Death !

## GAFFER'S LAST JOURNEY

Gaffer! this change to you that shrank from  
change,

That liked things every-day, not new and odd!  
Oh, do not let him find Heaven very strange,  
Please, God!

## BARBARA

### I

I SAW three ships go sailing,  
And two I've seen come back ;  
A ship of war, and a merchant ship,—  
And the third was a fisher-smack.

The first is back with glory,  
The next with treasure stor'd.—  
But the little 'smack, she'll ne'er be back,  
That had my love aboard.

### II

Seven riding-lights but now ;  
Now, only three.  
And still creeps the sheeted fog  
Across the numb sea.

## BARBARA

A night's fog for the fisher-boats,

A night's fog for the sea—

Night on night, day on day

A life's fog for me.

### III

North I turn, but never his face I find ;

South,—but it is not there !

Night cannot lull my sorrow asleep, nor dawn

Awaken my despair.

But, oft-times, twixt the rim of the dying day,

And the rim of the darkening sea,

Hope spies the pearly gleam of that far-off Sail,

Will give him back to me !

## THE POOL AND THE KINGFISHER

A DEEP Pool lay within a forest dark.

No grass grew on its brim,

No sun, no swallow knew the place ; it was

Vacant and drear and dim.

Thither, one day, a gem-bright Kingfisher

O, as the blue seas bright !

Swept, with a flash that waked the swooning air,

And smote the dark to light.

And the sad Pool rejoiced, and said : “ At last

Comes lightly to my breast

The natural lord of its unrifled deeps,—

And O, the glorious Guest !

## THE POOL AND THE KINGFISHER

“Now my perpetual pall of murky days

What secret Sun will line!

Now all my shadows shall with light be sped,

Or, lingering, learn to shine.

“And ye, charged Clouds, ye shall but gladden me

Now, with your rainbow rain!”

—The Bird was flying to his nest, far off,

And never came again.



## NAXOS

WHEN lonely on the once-delightful shore  
    Stood Ariadne, and the stern wind blew  
Steadily seaward, till at last she knew  
    Theseus could come no more :

Behold, a God, a God rush'd to her side!—  
    —Think you she cared? I know which way  
        she turn'd  
Fain eyes, and longing heart, and lips that burn'd ;  
    I know which name she cried !

For now the Godlike lot draws near to me ;  
    Yea, Love-of-one denied, comes Love-for-all,—  
But, where art *thou* ? Canst thou not hear me call,  
    O lost, lost Love, to thee ?

## LUSTLEIGH CLEAVE

THIS is a haunt of Peace! This room,  
Like some still convent-cell  
White-wall'd and innocently bare,  
Knoweth her presence well.

Her breath hath touch'd this quiet air,  
Her hand these quiet rills ;  
Her kiss yet lingers at the heart  
Of these shy daffodils.

As fields with dew, yon spacious sky  
Is sooth'd with her decree ;  
These open-hearted lonely hills  
Are made her sanctuary.

O that so consecrate and calm'd,  
O that so sure a shrine,  
So purposéd and so fulfill'd  
Were this hot heart of mine !

## THE ISHMAELITE

SOME men have souls like gardens,—

Fair plots of fruitful ground,  
Smooth lawns and ways well-order'd,  
With chosen blossoms border'd,  
And walls to fence them round.

O still and safe and fragrant!

Kind homes of peace and love!  
All things uncouth excluding,  
Free only to the brooding  
Of the great sky above!

## THE ISHMAELITE

'Tis said, by Angel-footsteps  
Such garden-paths are trod—  
Angels, the sky forsaking,  
Tend every blossom, making  
A pleasure-place for God.

—I have walk'd in some such garden.  
How well it was, how meet!  
Yet, down each alley shining,  
With tears I wander'd, pining  
For wild things round my feet!

Sweeter than thrush or robin,  
To me, the seagull's scream;  
Fairer the blacken'd heather  
That fronts the bleak moor-weather,  
Than that soft garden-dream.

## THE ISHMAELITE

Oh, peace is not so precious,  
Perchance, as is distress!  
Forbid Thine Angels, Father,  
To tend me—keep Thou rather  
One unwall'd wilderness!

## THE NEIGHBOUR

[“*Ἴν’ αὐτὸς ἦν πρόσουρος.*”—*Sophocles.*]

“LONELY, lonely, O life!” I said,  
“This path thou givest me to tread,  
Sadly I watch my fellow-kind  
Along the level roadway wind,  
Step mating step, and arms entwined.  
I from my uphill rut may see  
How readily, for weal, for woe,  
They win and render sympathy;  
But I for ever friendless go”—  
Saith a small voice: “Oh, say not so!  
Hast thou not me?”

## THE NEIGHBOUR

“Give me but leave to play my part,  
And be consoled, thou sick at heart !  
Ay, upon dreary errands sent  
With wrested will, and footsteps bent  
Into a byway, be content !  
One is but one, two make a world ;  
And two may laugh where one must weep.  
Whither is bubble Sorrow whirl’d  
When half is given a friend to keep ?  
Give me my half, whose life so deep  
    In thine lies furl’d !

“Hast heavy trouble ? I, too, bear it !  
Fugitive joy ? Yet I, too, share it !  
The dull ache of the listless sense,  
The fretted fire, the want immense,  
The rending passion, the pang intense—  
Friend ! I know all their influence,  
Comrade ! take heart !”

## THE NEIGHBOUR

O subtle bliss,  
O Hope, thro' desolation stealing  
Like water thro' a wilderness  
With comfort and delicious healing!  
Who renders me such fellow-feeling?  
—My own self 'tis!



## HOME

### I

BACK from the world of strangers,  
From exile drear I come.  
It is as tho' these mountains  
Had been my earliest home.

For all the pines and pastures,  
And all the snows above,  
And all the blue beyond them,  
Sing ; and their song is Love.

And all the peasant-faces  
Are brother-faces to me ;  
For this is Home—with Nature,  
And love, and liberty !

# HOME

## II

### THE FIRST NIGHT

AS I lay last night musing,  
A sweet and subtle sense  
O'erspread my heart, like music  
Contenting long suspense.

I felt as a little bud may,  
On the topmost twig of a tree  
Held up amid the moonlight  
God's open sky to see.

All my harsh cares grew tender,  
My heavy cares grew light,  
When Nature came to my bedside  
And kiss'd her child "good-night!"

# HOME

## III

### THE FIRST MORNING

THE sun rushes in at my lattice,  
And kisses the white walls gold;  
Into my heart he rushes,  
And kisses away the cold.

The trees are ringing with rapture;  
The rivulet, blithe as they,  
With bubbles of song is splashing  
The little laughing Day.

And there's clean, clean breath for every one,  
There's the breath of life for me!  
For the city is turn'd to country,  
And the prose to poesy!

## COTTAGE DAYS

### I

AS small winds at a window  
With just as little art,  
These gusts of song come calling  
At the casement of your heart

Open a tiny chink in it,  
And let them in, I pray !  
They will but throw a country kiss  
To you—and run away.

### II

#### THE STUDY

MY room has bare white walls,  
—So every sunbeam bright  
Runs naked round my room  
In unoffended light.

## COTTAGE DAYS

My room has bare white walls  
—So, if a daffodil  
Is yellow, in my room  
She shows quite yellow still.  
To give each thought full scope  
And every fact its due,  
Perhaps the mind of man  
Should go uncolour'd too?

### III

#### THE CONCERT

This gusty morning comes with gifts  
Of music to my room :  
She bids the Wind to ring in the roof,  
And in the chimney boom ;  
She marshals thick at my window-pane  
The reedy Raindrop choir ;  
And calls for wood, to whistle the songs  
Of last year to the fire ;

## COTTAGE DAYS

And (like a Starling, venturing notes  
That to the Thrush belong),  
Me too in this singing world she sets  
Crooning my little song.

### IV

#### LITTLE BOY AND LITTLE GIRL

HE is an apple-blossom,  
All gentle pink and white,  
With a bit of blue sky in either eye  
To keep it happy and bright ;

And she, a wild March violet,  
The daughter of wind and rain ;  
That flings you the bliss of a fragrant kiss—  
And snatches it back again !

## COTTAGE DAYS

### V

#### ROAD-SONGS

##### I

WORRY me, Wind, and vex me, Rain,  
And use me as you will ;  
But, should the Sun come out again,  
He'll find me singing still !

##### 2

To walk bare-headed, making songs  
And shouting them at the wind,  
May bring a headache—but it leaves  
A healthy heart behind !

##### 3

Why should these tiny breaths of air  
Sigh, as they push along ?  
Can it be, every one of *them*  
Is burden'd with a song ?

## COTTAGE DAYS

### VI

#### THE DEBT

O PLOUGHBOY with the purple eyes  
That are so strangely clear,  
Did you make all the little songs  
I meet so often here?

Is it from out your singing heart  
That into mine they come?  
And are they flying to my lips  
Because they found yours dumb?

And is that why you look at me  
Half friendly, half in shame?  
(And twice you stopp'd and spoke to me,  
And once you ask'd my name.)

Brother! should they indeed be yours,  
And this my fancy true—  
Hark how they do but leave my lips  
To flutter home to you!



## COTTAGE DAYS

### VII

#### THE FAREWELL

AT this lock'd door of past delights,  
Towards my tranquil singing cell,  
My minstrel days, and minstrel nights,  
Turning, I pause to say "Farewell!"  
O dawns of dewy grey, that broke  
On throstles singing in the dark!  
O firelit evenings, when what spark  
Fell! and what long-dead flame awoke,  
What prison'd bird within me sang  
Till in my heart the rafters rang!  
Silence creeps close; once more the drowsy spell  
Falls—falls. O swift and sudden Song, farewell!

Farewell, dear neighbours, ten days past  
Unhoped—by your quick courtesies,  
Your swift upleaping sympathies,  
Bound now unto Regret, how fast!  
To all the faithful homely care

## COTTAGE DAYS

That of kind tones and friendly ways  
Almost too natural for praise  
Serv'd daily such unstinted fare,  
And pillow'd every night my head  
On pleasantness remembered,  
Must now "Do not forget!" be said!  
And you, my human blossoms twain,  
My little maid, my little man,  
Give me that good-bye kiss again,  
And me remember—while you can!  
My playtime now is over, and Heart's-rest  
Retain no longer may her random guest.  
Nature, farewell! O frolic showers  
Free winds, and childish-ey'd Spring flowers,  
Wide wings of Heaven undefiled,  
Fallows, and airy-headed down,  
O, all things simple, all things wild,  
Farewell! Once more the scarce-trod track,  
The chance good-greeting must I lack;  
Must to the thick confusion of the town

## COTTAGE DAYS

And to its loneliness, once more go back !  
—Yet, as I turn away, and take my load,  
To go (not singing now) the dust-deep road,  
Surely a little richer is my store  
And yet my burden lighter than before?  
Music was mine ! whereof some piecèd stave,  
Tho' sad miswrit, yet in my hand I have ;  
A word or two of Nature's in mine ear,  
In my regard her blessed look more clear,  
Deep in my breast the love of her more dear !

Ay, and to this delicious gratitude,  
This heartier grip on human brotherhood,  
If it may be, the surer sight of eyes

A little less averted from life's whole.  
(Quicker to spy out Beauty in disguise,  
Keener to note how lowliest lives may be  
Nests for the heavenward laverock, Poesy),  
The heart more warm, I hope the humbler soul  
To such delights farewell I need not say ;  
These are my cottage-gifts, to take away !

## TO LIFE

O LIFE, mysterious ! looking down  
On me, with pregnant brows that frown,  
    Lock'd lips that smile :  
I ask not what is meted me,  
The issues of my destiny  
    If proud or vile ;

Sorrow, or joy, my course control—  
What matter ? so thou grant my soul  
    Sure sight and keen ;  
That she may throughly penetrate  
Each curse, each blessing ; soon or late  
    Grasp all they mean !

## THE BRINK OF BATTLE

YON mute grandeur of the midnight Heaven  
Hangs like some dread destiny o'erhead.  
Earth is dumb with awe, the air is stricken  
Voiceless ; light is over, day is dead.  
Only do my footsteps break the silence,  
Trampling peace beneath their restless tread ;

Only do my thoughts go whirling, whirling,  
'Mid the stillness in tempestuous rush,  
Like a thousand emulous warriors surging  
Heavily against this world-wide hush—  
Heavily ! O God ! have they not power  
Twenty human hearts like mine to crush ?

## THE BRINK OF BATTLE

What is it that arms them? Is it sorrow  
Or remorse has made their shafts so keen?  
Have their arrows drunk of foil'd ambition's  
Bitter poison? Or hath mad doubt been  
Forger of their weapons? Neither; only  
This same quiet, plain accustom'd scene.

Just these four red walls, this closed quadrangle!  
Nothing lovely in it, saving peace,  
Save security, and unstorm'd shelter.  
O harsh world, O pain that cannot cease,  
Even ere your fetters fasten round me,  
Cries my captive heart: "Release! Release!"

Cries, and sickens with a desperate longing,  
Even now, in thought of what will be,  
For this vision of pure calm untroubled.  
Eyes of mine! look, drink it in, O see  
Everything, miss nothing! This may solace  
(Who knows?) days and nights of misery.

## THE BRINK OF BATTLE

—Moonlight suddenly ! And behold ! above me  
Shine the four stone Faces, white and stern,  
From the dark wall : Molière, and Dante,  
Æschylus and Shakespeare—souls that yearn  
Still, perhaps, for love and light and knowledge,  
Or, perhaps,—who knows what they discern ?

They lived once on earth, these men, with foreheads  
Stamp'd by some high quest's tremendous toil,  
And wide eyes, intent to pierce the darkness  
With an earnestness no fear could foil.  
Ay, and, living, to what pain, what terror,  
Paid their hearts the tribute of recoil ?

Yet how fathomless, O God ! the anguish  
Needed to produce Thee souls so grand !  
They accepted all ; and from my pittance  
Dare I shrink ? No, never ! from Thy hand,  
See ! I snatch my orders to Life's battle,  
Seize my chance to suffer and to stand !

## PEBBLES

PEBBLES, pebbles by the sea,  
Is it, I wonder, better to be  
Snatch'd away by the hurrying waves,  
Swallow'd down to the rolling caves,  
Where the mad water wrestles and raves :  
Dash'd upon rocks, champ'd amid foam,  
Toss'd and turn'd,  
Trampled and churn'd,  
Spued out at last on the self-same shore,  
Flung back awhile to the self-same home,  
—Not the same pebbles as before !  
But smooth'd and rounded and jewel bright,  
A line of laughter, a dance of light,  
The shore's glory, the sun's delight :



## PEBBLES

Or is it better, high and dry  
Out of the great sea's reach to lie?  
Night by night and day by day  
From the wild waves hid away :  
On a landward ledge to stay,  
Never fretted, jostled, hurl'd  
    With a jarring crash,  
    And a sharp splash,  
From the surety and the peace  
Of your never-changing world :  
Comfortable, safe, at ease :  
—Sore to the eye, sharp to the hand,  
Stark upon the weary strand  
Like bleach'd bones in an unslaked land?

## HILL DUTIFUL

[“ . . . Since it is the will of God that thou shouldst learn to bear tribulation without consolation. . . .”  
*Imitation of Christ.*]

THERE was a Traveller I beheld one day ;  
Down in a valley, wrapt in dreams, he lay.  
Before his closéd eyelids, sheer and sharp,  
Torn into peak and chasm and jagged scarp,  
A mighty mountain from the vale uprose.

He slept ; but from that sleep of scant repose,  
Broken by frequent start and fitful sigh,  
Woke, as I watch'd, with a most bitter cry :  
“ Rest ! Rest ! O thou wild brain, and beating  
breast,

What will assuage this torment ? O for rest ! ”  
“ (I heard the mountain-echo answer : “ Rest ! ”)

## HILL DUTIFUL

Then, on the mountain fixing dazéd eyes  
All pale with pain, and groping with maim'd hand  
Upon the unhelpful earth, half did he rise,  
Half dragg'd himself to where the first rocks stand,  
The mountain-foot, firm-fixt amid the sand ;  
Groaning : " No rest for me ! So sore bestead,  
Surely some little rest might have been mine ?  
Poor wretch ! these limbs to battle up yon dread  
Shelterless road, and yon star-piercing line  
O'erstep, and not one moment's anodyne ?—  
Lo ! I but craved one meagre moment's sleep,  
And rent it was to visions wild and vague,  
Spectres and shades of yon unending steep !  
Ay, slumber's self for me is turn'd a plague ;  
Dim are mine eyes with watching ; my hands bleed,  
Dull languor loads my feet and weary brain ;  
And I have none to cry to in my need,  
None with whose help I might take heart again.  
Would Death were come ! since Life is nought  
but pain."

## HILL DUTIFUL

He ceas'd. Throughout the great plain, far  
and wide,  
Silence. Throughout the sky and lonely air,  
Silence. There was not any that replied ;  
And Death, for all his ranging, came not there.

. . . What stirred him? For at length his  
hands laid hold  
Upon the toothed rock. His nerveless feet  
Trail'd on the scorching sand, dizzily roll'd  
His head aside, and all that heavy heat  
Of valley-mist hung on him—none the less  
He grasp'd the rock, groaning for pain, and drew  
His body slowly up with hard distress.  
That day the barren rock drank blood for dew.

On, on, and ever upward! Till I thought :  
"The man, poor fool, so weak he is, and blind,  
Must fall, in chilly Vertigo's clutches caught—  
Meet fate," I said, "for such a maniac mind!"

## HILL DUTIFUL

Yet he climb'd on, and fell not ; high and higher  
He climb'd, and scaled the first peak's slippery  
spire.

Then I, far down the valley, heard his cry  
Come strongly piercing thro' the lazy air,  
And heard it in amaze : " Happy am I,  
That am escaped out of the subtle snare ! "  
The shuddering valley-vapour shrank in fear  
And fled, before that voice elate and clear ;  
His every word came sharply to mine ear.

" Blessed be this keen wind, that frees my brain  
From torturing phantoms ! Blessed each rough crag  
That lets me feel thro' every tingling vein  
Life strongly throb ! No more my footsteps flag,  
They dread no more their journey—'tis begun !  
And plain the path, 'neath this unsoften'd sun !

" Blessed am I, with none that may console,  
No stalwart friend to travel at my side !

## HILL DUTIFUL

So have I learn'd mine own steps to control,  
Myself is made unto myself a guide.  
On! on! with living limbs, and eyes that see;  
Out of my weakness, strength is come to me!"

Then rose he from his resting-place and went,  
Still climbing; not, 'tis certain, without fears,  
Not without woe and black bewilderment.  
That steep must still grow steeper as it nears  
The far-off summit, and the end appears.

"Yea, at the end of all, what found he?" Friend,  
I know not; I have never seen the end.

## LIGHT AND NIGHT

LIGHT! Light! Light!

Mother of the wide-ey'd flowers,

Mother of glad lips and bright

Dancing feet of the noontide hours,

Dancing with delight!

Oh, the joy, the rapture strong,

Thrilling thro' the entrancéd air,

When thy glory rides along

Heaven's high rampart bare!

Mother of ecstasy, Mother of might,

Come, sweet Light!

## LIGHT AND NIGHT

Light, fierce Light !

O intolerable gaze,

O unstay'd insatiate blight,

Battening thy relentless blaze

On the roots of sight !

Mercy ! Mercy ! Mind and heart

Writhe beneath the unswerving fire !

Mercy, mercy, Light ! Depart,

Thou first-begot of Ire !

O for dulness, darkness, Night !

Hence, dread Light !

Darkness dear !

Come, Consoler, softly laying,

Over parched lives and sere,

Dusk of dewy pinions, saying,

" Rest ye ! I am here."



## LIGHT AND NIGHT

Hands lie folded, hearts grow deep,  
Thro' hot eyelids, many a tear,  
Balmy, gradual, doth creep,  
Heralds of the cool-hand Sleep  
Gliding slowly near.

What hath Peace to do with Light?

Come, sweet Night

Darkness drear!

Dungeon vast of voiceless gloom!  
Blindfold, deaf and dumb with fear,  
Like stark corpses in a tomb  
Mouldering, lie we here ;  
While the stealthy blackness winds  
Wormlike round each rotting limb,  
And with slimy torpor binds  
Mildew'd hearts and stagnant minds  
In corruption grim.

Mercy! Give us mercy, Night!

Give us Light!

## LIGHT AND NIGHT

Nay, but what shall satisfy ?

—This : the swift alternate racing

When the sunlit shadows fly

From the shadowy sunlight's chasing

Footsteps following nigh.

Broken darkness, broken light,

Knowledge knit with mystery,

Glory temper'd with a sigh—

Man's inconstant spirit-sight

Needs a shifting sky ;

Joy, with sorrow ; wrong, with right ;

Light, with Night !

## THE BRIAR-ROSE

(After the Picture-series by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.)

'TIS the latest day of the latest year,  
And the latest hour of the latest day.  
The wan light swooneth as with fear  
Around Truth's prison hoary-grey ;  
Sweet Lady, she, and loved right dear—  
But ah, the Briars,  
The Thorns and Briars !

And to-night the stealthy Briars mean death  
To Truth so long in thraldom pent ;  
This night, to suck her struggling breath  
The last malignant shoot is sent.

## THE BRIAR-ROSE

And where is the love that delivereth  
From the cunning Briars,  
The clinging Briars?

Many have loved her, in many a guise,  
From many a realm of heart and soul;  
Each and all with one wisdom wise,  
For they turn'd their steps to the one same goal,  
One quest deepen'd their wistful eyes—  
But (oh, the Briars,  
The mighty Briars!)

One was the guerdon Fate decreed!  
—Still, still, the unpenetrated walls  
Lie safe (alas! may none succeed?)  
Safe! and a foul joy writhes and crawls  
In them that on the dead men feed,  
The lusty Briars,  
The full-fed Briars.

## THE BRIAR-ROSE

Day dies ; Truth dies ! But who is this ?

O warrior, O latecoming Knight,

Welcome ! . . . Ah, will he win or miss ?

Calm are those eyes that burn so bright,

Helm'd are those brows with steadfastness,

Take heed, ye Briars,

Ye flaunting Briars !

See ! see ! what tho' his hand is torn,

His lifted face with bloodstains wet,

What tho' the thirsty spikes of thorn

Weave him a ghastly carcanet—

Steadily are his footsteps set

Amid the Briars,

And thro' the Briars. . . .

O glorious Knight, securely brave !

Gain'd is the great oak door at last ! . . .

Now anew he buffets the biting wave. . . .

The porch is pass'd, and the courtyard pass'd.

## THE BRIAR-ROSE

Yet round him—Christ ! how the Briars rave,  
The snaky Briars,  
The venom'd Briars !

Now he treadeth the first high hall,  
Where Judge and Poet, Scholar and King,  
Loll in the web of a subtle thrall,  
Stifled by wreaths that catch and cling.  
Ay, catch and cling, for ye soon shall fall,  
Ye cozening Briars,  
Ye choking Briars !

What of the inner chamber there? . . .  
O pitiful chamber, place of ruth !  
Paven all with maidens fair,  
Strewn with the bodyguard of Truth,  
Caught, at her door, in the dreamy snare  
Of the kissing Briars,  
The smothering Briars !

## THE BRIAR-ROSE

Ah, Wisdom and fair Innocence,

Bound so fast in easeless ease !

Yet, holy heart, and love immense,

Linger not here to succour these ;

Love Truth before her votaries !

On, thro' the Briars,

The desperate Briars !

Oh, falter not, but set her free !

Break, break the Briars that round her twine !

Pierce they thy heart? What's that to thee?

Welcome thou death, so life may shine

From Truth's eyes, lifted gloriously

O'er the blossom'd Briars,

The sweet Rose-Briars !

## COMFORT

WE are as clouds that flit across the moon  
And vanish soon.  
From Night we pass a moment into Light,  
Then, into Night.

—What matter? Clouds and moon, all heaven  
and earth,  
Being little worth,  
Pass. But what's valuable remaineth sure;  
God doth endure!



## A NORTHERN MÆNAD

COMRADE ! Comrade !

Pinetrees, have you seen my Comrade ?

Have ye seen him, gentle beeches ?

In and out the lonely woodland

Still I follow, still he flies.

Wherefore fly

Heart of hearts ? Ah, Face of faces,

Wherefore wilt thou hide ? Yet, hidden,

Look upon my face—it withers,

And my heart it dies, for thee !

The brown bracken

Droops ; the bark falls off the branches ;

Crush the moss, my feet ! For crushen,

Cast-off, dead, I wander ; unsought,

Undesir'd, not recognised !

## A NORTHERN MÆNAD

Yet, with low moss

Heavenly dew do house, bright sunbeams  
Swim i' the bark, yea, winds the faded  
Bracken woo. But me—Ah, Death, Death,  
In my hand even thine lies loose!

Ah, but once!—

The Spring dawn . . . the touch . . . the  
whisper . . .  
Oh, the dread! and tears a many,  
Blinding—till the leafy branches  
Quiver'd yet, but thou wast flown!

Ah, once more!

The blue summer-night, . . . the woodward  
Chamber singing to the passing  
Of thy wing! . . . I burst the dream-webs,  
Up I sprang! . . . But thou wast flown!

## A NORTHERN MÆNAD

. . . Died the leaves.

Sleep I slew for thee, and for thee  
Drain'd the tear-wells dry. Then said I,  
"I shall see him now!" not knowing,  
Then, my speed was but thy spur.

(*The Wind blows.*) Hark! The sad Sea  
Moans . . . Nay, winds do walk the tree-tops . . .  
Nay . . . what? what? . . . Footsteps! Feet  
running  
Hither, hither at last! Belovéd,  
Here (Heaven shield me!), I am here!

(*It passes.*) Gone!  
Past! . . . Not seen! . . . Begone! I hate thee!—  
Ah, no, no! . . . Yet see, yon dead leaves  
Rise, and with a voice of piping  
Dance behind thy dancing feet:

## A NORTHERN MÆNAD

(*The setting sun shines out.*) Yon grave pines,—  
Oh, the glamour, the bright glory  
Vesting them! . . . thou passest! Pity,  
O mere wood, O leaves I trampled,  
Ye, the vision'd, me, the blind!

—Wilt thou mock me  
As the village youths, and all the  
Maidens? (Ah, how much less cruel  
They, outcast who do but call me,  
Call me, have not made me, mad!)

Mock me, then!

Weeps at home my Mother, and the  
Cold fog crawls. But thou didst seek me  
Once! I seek thee, Comrade, Comrade,  
Till I find, or till I die!

## THE UNKNOWN QUEST

THE pines stand up in strong tranquillity,  
The smooth air sleeps like water in a well ;  
But rest comes never to this restless Sea,  
Still heaving with the old incessant swell,  
Still clamouring with the old incessant cry.  
Thou hast no peace, O Sea ! No peace have I !

Nought else is discontent this happy day ;  
Even the sky, thy lover, full and tense  
With palpable glee, forgets, and can be gay ;  
But *thou* rememberest ! That unquiet sense  
No sun, no windless weather may appease,  
No calm allay that cry, and let it cease.

## THE UNKNOWN QUEST

And thro' that ever-importuning voice,  
My soul divines and claims a sister-soul,  
That, clothed upon with whatsoever joys,  
Finds never freedom from the stern control  
Of that same dark and irresistible Force  
Me also driving on a chartless course.

I would not fling away my life, God knows,  
But—should this rock lean over . . . should I fall,  
Sink, rise . . . then feel thine arms about me close,  
Feel this my life ta'en from me, once for all:  
I, so I faced and found THAT—O my Sea,  
To what a haven wouldst thou have guided me!

What craving, dost thou clamour day and night?  
Seeking for what, can I desire life past?  
Death! Death! within thy dark shall we find light,  
And, 'mid thy void, our certain goal at last?—  
Find, as it were, some once-familiar Breast  
That will regather us—and so find rest?

## NEREIA

*TIRED of solemn toil, of restless search  
After the truth of things that still seem false :  
Tired of all our subtle schemes to catch  
The living thought, to rend and ravage it,  
Till at its heart of hearts our ruthless thirst  
For motives and hid meanings and dark signs  
Of something great, profound, and serious  
Be glutt'd : tir'd of these, and tir'd to death  
Of mine own feverish mind and seething doubts,  
I snatch'd a quiet week by the blue sea,  
And set to words a picture of my brain  
Mere colour, hoping to find rest thereby.—*

Grey glimmering twilight fill'd the dewy air,  
Right overhead, the dim mysterious sky  
Hung motionless ; but, far away, it slid  
Smoothly and slow into the tranquil sea,

## NEREIA

And sank in it and melted. And the sea  
And sky and air were silent, for the dawn  
Was not far off; all things lay still and watch'd.  
Above the sea, rose, like some giant ghost,  
Because the pallid air had swathed it round,  
The great pile of the palace; ghostly, too,  
Show'd the broad parapet, and the marble steps  
That lead from it into the sea beneath;  
But, in the day, they all are dazzling white,  
Steps, palace, parapet, all a burning white  
Beneath the full blue sky.

The water swung  
With lazy splash over the sheeny steps,  
Or lifted little lips that curl'd and smiled,  
Too listless now for laughter, to the verge  
Of the unmoved marble, then sank back to rest;  
Laugh'd not, nor sobb'd, but breathed and slept  
and dream'd.



## NEREIA

And on the fair broad ledges of the steps,  
So that the lifted wavelets, now and then  
Kiss'd the soft flesh that was as smooth as they :  
As they are wont to lie there on calm nights,  
With every dimple quiet, every voice  
Hushen, and every rounded limb at rest :  
Lay little children cluster'd, fast asleep.  
As, sometimes, looking down the clear blue depth,  
You mark, close-cluster'd in some creviced rock,  
Bright sea flowers tossing all their hair abroad :  
But, could you raise the rock, and bare the bells,  
The rosy bells, of water, you should see  
How quietly their life would lock itself  
Within them—they would sink upon the rock  
And sleep, and never move : even so, they slept,  
The tender rosy children.

Higher up,  
The soft air, gliding from the garden, bore  
Fresh fragrance from the lips of sleeping flowers

## NEREIA

To lips more fresh and flowers more beautiful.  
For on the marble terrace lay asleep,  
Beneath the purple awning still outspread,  
A multitude of maidens. Softly fell  
The clinging robes round the fair limbs, relax'd,  
At touch of sleep's kind hand, into such grace  
As movement scarce can know. Some spell it  
    seem'd

Had sweetly stol'n upon them unaware,  
With dreamy mesh enfolding them; for none  
Had laid her down as tho' in wait for sleep,  
Yet every one was bended low with sleep  
As rosebuds bend with dew. One stay'd her head  
Upon the knees of another, whose own throat,  
Fall'n back on the low parapet 'mid the mass  
Of all her dusky tresses, gleam'd and shone  
Even thro' the dim grey air; and close beside,  
With both arms hawthorn-white cross'd wearily,  
And tir'd brow droop'd upon them, lay one more—  
Indeed, the ground was strewn with sleeping girls.

## NEREIA

But one, apart a little from the rest,  
And to the sea most near, kept still her face  
Seaward, as tho' a faithful watcher yet,  
Even amid dreams, for somewhat that should come.  
Those other maids but as a fair hedge were  
For this, the fairest of the garden. She  
Liege lady was by birth and beauty,—she,  
Nereia, Princess, sea-named and sea-soul'd.

For by the sea it was she first drew breath,  
And the first sight that met her opening eyes  
Was the broad blue, a-dazzle with the sun.  
Nor ever in all her sixteen years had she  
Made once a journey to the dismal lands  
That never see the ocean; but her ears  
Might still receive its music, and her lips  
Echo the voice of the waves. Her dancing eyes  
Were sea-blue, and the sun shone clear in them  
(Yea, you might read, if you knew how to read,

## NEREIA

Each happy thought before she utter'd it,  
So limpid lay the depth of those blue eyes).  
Over her head the hair in ripples ran,  
Bright in their brownness as the crisped lines  
Of polish'd pebbles that the water flings,  
In frolic, up and down the sunny beach.  
Her forehead, level as the sea far-spread,  
Was pure like foam ; her steps were light and free,  
As the light breeze that springs, at dawn of day  
And lustrous even, from the dappled strand  
Where earth and ocean meet. Fair, she, and fresh,  
Buoyant, deep-hearted, untamed, beautiful ;  
In all ways as our radiant summer sea,  
Beneath whose flickering dance of sun and wave,  
Throbs the vast volume of an unknown power ;  
Loving the ocean as a sister, friend,  
A more than mother to her, left motherless.

Only, she long'd, once and again, for him  
Who should be sun to her, and she to him

## NEREIA

Sea-like, re-flashing golden love and joy.  
And having gain'd her life's whole treasure from  
The generous-hearted ocean, also this  
She look'd to have from the same loving hand.  
And did not look in vain, for, not long since,  
Over the shifting waters, like a breeze  
To bring the day new freshness, had there come  
A gift indeed, a word ineffable,  
Meet to give thanks for—how the mighty Prince  
Who is the lord of all lands round about,  
The loving lord of very loving lands :  
Whose goodly grace o'erflowing flings abroad,  
Thro' all his realm, delight : as when the sun  
At evening overswells his brimming disc,  
And, flooded with pure fire, the rich air glows  
(This is at sunset, but the Prince breathes yet  
Morn's unspent vigour) : how this royal lord,  
Extoll'd of all for beauty and for power,  
Bless'd and belov'd of all, sought yet one gift,—  
The crowning glory of Nereia's love.

## NEREIA

And she, a simple maid, what had she done  
But given him love long since, his noble deeds  
Caught with a rapture to her noble heart?  
Yet never had she seen him face to face;  
But, daily looking for his coming, grew  
Daily more beautiful, and was most glad.

So when, the day before this dawn, a sloop,  
Sharp-prow'd, and winged like a butterfly,  
Came flitting past the palace, and brought news  
Of royal vessels, sailing stately slow  
Towards the great rock that keeps the bay at peace,  
Nereia clapp'd her hands for joy, and ran  
And stood upon the steps; and there stay'd long  
Looking for him that was to come. But all  
The colour faded from the molten west,  
And fainter grew the faint sea-line; and still  
No vessel. Then the stars leapt out to watch,  
And the great moon made smooth a silver way

## NEREIA

From the high rock straight to Nereia's feet :  
But still no vessel.

Then Nereia spake :

“ At dawn he will be here ; the sleeping breeze  
Will wake at dawn, and quickly bring him here ;  
And he shall find me watching when he comes !  
Here on the terrace will I bide, until  
Day breaks ; yea, here a vigil will I keep,  
I and my maidens with me.”

So they stay'd,  
She and her maidens, there ; but presently  
Longing for rest grew all too much for them,  
The dainty maidens, and they sank to sleep.  
But she, that bore within her breast a heart  
Throbbing with expectation and strange joy,  
Desired not sleep, but kept wide-open eyes,  
Lest suddenly the breeze should blow again,  
And bring him to the shore, unseen, unhail'd.

## NEREIA

Long time she stood hard by the parapet,  
Like a bright beacon 'mid the dusky night,  
For she was very tall and white of limb,  
And shone in the moonbeams.

But the night wore on,  
And still the stars kept vigil, and the moon,  
And fair Nereia watch'd with them; but still  
No vessel rounded the black jutting rock.

Till, hearing the soft breathing of her maids  
Borne slumbrously upon the air, and all  
The gentle heavings of the broad sea-breast,  
She also sank at last to sleep, o'ercome  
By the kind quiet and persuasive peace;  
Murmuring low, like a last evening prayer  
Oft-times repeated: "Prithee hasten, Love!"  
Then slumber touch'd her lips, and all was still.

But now the flushing of the dawn began  
To stir within the innocent-hearted heaven;



## NEREIA

And thro' the tender-breaking little rifts  
Of faintest crimson, quietly stole forth  
The young life of the morning ; and the sky  
Woke softly from soft slumber, drawing back  
Out of the sea's embrace, but still the sea  
Slept ; nor awoke till Dawn sent forth her swift  
Thin-winged messenger, the early breeze,  
With its light touch to rouse the dreamy waves,  
Telling them " Day is come !"

And presently

Nereia's spirit felt the faint sweet stir  
That pass'd along the water and the sky ;  
And, tenderly as sleep had taken her,  
As tenderly it left her, stealing forth  
By secret ways that no man knoweth of.  
So from the dewy darkness of her dreams  
The damsel's spirit fared, but linger'd yet  
Within the shadowy opal-tinted mist  
That tremulously veers round wakening eyes.  
For, first, she knew she had the sea in sight,

## NEREIA

And then it pass'd from her ; yet still she heard,  
Far-off, its voice ; then open'd wide her eyes,  
Yet knew not where she was ; and closed her eyes,  
Yet knew she was a-watch for one to come.  
And thus she pictured vague sweet visions forth—  
How she would push her light skiff from the shore,  
And row her to the vessel where he stood,  
And how her hand should touch him, and his face  
Should turn towards her—here her eyes grew large  
To look, but only saw, still in a dream,  
The many-colour'd water ; so that thought  
Left her, and fled. Anon, with eyelids dropp'd,  
She mused again how the tall ship should swing  
On the bright water 'neath the gleaming wall  
That girds the harbour, and with hasty step  
The Prince come forth to find her, where she sat  
Among her maidens on the terrace there ;  
And how, before her kneeling, he should pray—  
But here she laugh'd aloud, to think the Prince  
To her should kneel ! and, starting at the sound,

## NEREIA

Open'd her eyes and half-beheld the sea,  
Laid, blue and darkling, 'neath the pale blue sky  
Whereon were spread dawn's rosy ruffled wings;  
Till, last, her idle gaze fell on the line  
Sundering sky and ocean. What was that  
Which marr'd the perfect globing of the curve  
Hard by the purple rock? Her dreamy mind  
Sprang into vigilant life. She saw the fleck  
How it grew greater, greater,—nay, became  
No longer one, but manifold, each part  
Instantly limn'd more clear, more dark, upon  
The brightening sky—till suddenly there shot  
Out of the midst a fairy white-wing'd bird,  
That flew and floated o'er the gentle sea  
Right towards the palace-stairway; but the rest  
Went sweeping onwards, up the wide-mouth'd bay;  
And then Nereia saw that they were ships,  
Tall and full-sail'd, that, moving stately on,  
Sought room to ride within the harbour, where  
Was water deep eno' for such great keels.

## NEREIA

But the white bird flew swiftly o'er the sea  
Even to the palace steps. Full near it came,  
And lo ! it was a pinnacle that she saw,  
With pearly sails, and with a well-carv'd prow  
That bore the semblance of a maiden's face.  
Then up she sprang, and stretch'd her fair arms  
wide

In joyful expectation, all untouch'd  
By shadow of fear ; Nereia knew not fear ;  
And in her rapture cried aloud, and woke  
The sleeping maids and children at her feet,  
Crying with joy, " O Love ! My Love ! " No less  
The new-born waves, delighting in the voice  
That was their sister's, raced each other swift  
Back from the shore to the fair-carven prow,  
Chiming in crystal choruses her words  
Clearly ; and there was one who heeded them.

But when the boat sped nearer, and the sand  
Grew silvery 'neath the shallowing blue waves,

## NEREIA

One leapt into the water, and came, tall  
And radiant, wading knee-deep, to the steps.  
And she, with wave-like musical motion, pass'd  
Rapidly down the marble, till she came  
To the last pavement that the water smooth'd  
With shimmering light; beyond was nought save  
sand.

And, as she gain'd the sea, and he the shore,  
Lo! in triumphant glory burst the sun  
Out of his rosy palace gates. The sea  
Grew gold for joy, and golden glow'd the sails,  
And golden joy sprang in Nereia's soul.  
Her face was bent on his, her love's, her lord's,  
His face, whom she would crown with her glad  
troth.

For seeing how the sunbeams on his head  
Laid their royal diadem of glorious light,  
And what a dazzling radiance had its home

## NEREIA

In his deep eyes, she doubted not at all,  
But, "It is thou!" she cried, and eagerly  
Flung forth her hands, to meet his eager hands  
Outstretch'd; then rais'd her face, and sang aloud:  
"O Mother Sea, rejoice, rejoice with me!

My Love is come!

Cry loud with lisping voice,

Ye little waves, "Rejoice!"

Because my Love, my Love, my Love is come!

O mighty Mother Sea, rejoice with me!

"Thou, Bridegroom Sun, rejoice, rejoice with me!

My Love is come!

Wake with thy golden glance

The ripples' gladdest dance,

Because my Love, my Love, my Love is come!

O great and glorious Sun, rejoice with me!"

Soon as she paus'd, he broke free from the spell  
With which her sudden song had bound him.

## NEREIA

### Straight

He leapt to land, and clasp'd her as she stood.  
And she, forgetting all the sun and sea,  
Saw but his eyes, felt but his kiss, and knew  
This was indeed her bridegroom. So they met.

But now a babble of voices rose around—  
The wondering children shouting, and the maids  
Down the white stairway flocking towards the  
twain,  
Tumultuous with joy, to lead them in.  
So then Nereia took her lover's hand,  
And led him to the palace. Very white  
And snow-white was it, in the morning sun.  
Only the almond blossom hung her veil,  
Mazy and delicate, before the gates,  
And, on the topmost terrace, oranges  
Leant their gold shadowless discs, full-orb'd and  
bright,

## NEREIA

'Gainst the blue shadowless sky. And as they  
went

Up the broad steps, link'd hand in hand, the twain  
Laugh'd, because life was grown so beautiful,  
But spake not.

Then a damsel took her lyre,  
And sang, more sweet than any bird that sings  
Within the garden at the dawn of day :

“Sunbeams, sparkling on the sea,  
Sunbeams on the summer sea,  
Are sad tears compared with thee,  
Tears, compared with thee, Love!  
Also they must die with day,  
Dull the sea must grow, and grey,—  
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,  
Thou wilt live for aye, Love !

“Fair pink blossoms on the tree,  
Almond-blossoms on the tree,



## NEREIA

Are sharp thorns compared with thee,  
    Thorns, compared with thee, Love!  
Also, they must fade away,  
Not for long the tree is gay—  
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,  
    Thou wilt live for aye, Love!"

Thereon, another, at Nereia's side,  
Her favourite damsel, took the song and sang:

"Warm blue eyes, blue as the sea,  
Eyes as living as the sea,  
Are cold as Death, Love, without thee,  
    Death-cold without thee, Love!  
Touch them, Love! Ah, golden day!  
See what these glad sparkles say!  
Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,  
    Thou wilt live for aye, Love!"

## NEREIA

“Lips like blossoms on the tree,  
Pink buds on the almond tree,  
Are mute as Death, Love, without thee,  
Death-mute without thee, Love!  
Touch them, Love! Ah, golden day!  
Hear what these pink petals say!  
‘Thou, once born, wilt live for aye,  
Thou wilt live for aye, Love!’”

Then blithe Nereia turn'd her face, and look'd,  
Burning with beauty like the glittering sea,  
Full in her bridegroom's eyes. He, mute for love,  
Told her such truth with them that her blest soul  
Could scarce contain itself. Then sang the maid:  
“One look—and Love was there to see!  
One clasp—Love lock'd them tenderly!  
What's Life itself, compared with thee,  
Dear Life, compared with thee, Love?”

## NEREIA

Whereat Nereia's happy heart burst forth  
Into the song, and thus she ended it :

“O Life, sweet Life, be glad alway !  
Our life hath witness'd Love's birthday,  
And Love, once born, will live for aye,  
Yea, thou wilt live for aye, Love !”

And so they pass'd within the palace gates ;  
And all the sky was blue, and the sea blue.

## LEON

THE good Lord, Leon of Northumberland,  
King Ector's son, had trouble in his youth.  
For, first, there was a malison on his birth,  
So that his thigh was shrunken ; next, his sire,  
A great lord, and a mighty man of war,  
Hated him, being angry at his hurt :  
And then, his mother, whose whole life had been  
One prayer for him, with a sad, heavy heart  
Died in his greenhead youth.

When she was dead,  
Leon, taught curtly how that, being maim'd,  
Joustings and tourneys and the joy of war  
Were not for him, and making curt reply  
He was not for the cloister, found it best  
To call the forest home ; and there dwelt long,  
Father'd and mother'd but by loneliness,

## LEON

Tutor'd in war by beasts, in gentleness  
By the small woodland creatures, and in hate  
By all he knew of men. Meanwhile he grew  
Goodly of face and stature, strong and brave—  
A fair lord, but he had a maimed side.

Once, in the season when the charmed woods  
Dream and awake not, and the dank blue mist,  
Swinging by ghostly hands twixt bole and bole,  
Doth print them round with lichens and wet moss:  
One heavy noon, beside a mildew'd pool,  
Moody he sat, and wish'd, he scarce knew what.  
All on a sudden, sharp and shrill rang out  
A clamour, "Help! O help!" And straight be-  
stirr'd

By headlong instinct, as a wounded hare  
Not stays, but runneth fleetly to its home,  
So limping Leon ran; and found a Queen  
With two that would have done her knight to  
death.

## LEON

Now men he hated, but his mother's love  
Spake for the Queen, and, leaping on those churls,  
With unmail'd hands he smote at them, so sore,  
So sudden, that their coward's valour slunk  
For hiding to their heels. "A pouncing beast!"  
One cried; the other, "Mercy!" and they fled.

Then the Queen stood upright, and from her face,  
Panting, drew down the veil. He knew her not,  
But she was Morgan, the great wizard Queen,  
And she knew him, and (for she ow'd him thanks,  
And therewith ever loved a goodly face)  
Cast spells for him; so, as it were a film  
Cover'd her eyes, her voice brake out in gasps,  
And as a rime-bound branch upstanding stiff,  
"Good cheer," she said, "Sir Leon! From the sea  
Comes Venus, and the daughter of a king.  
Look clear, speak loud, bow low; thou shalt wed  
high."

## LEON

Amazed at what he saw, yet more amazed  
At what he heard, Leon stood dumb ; but when  
The life flow'd back into her thawing limbs,  
And made her face once more a woman's, he,  
Catching his breath, besought more counsel. " Go,  
Get to the sea !" she said, and, bending down,  
Like one of very flesh and blood she search'd  
The wide wounds of her knight, and said no more.  
But Leon, lingering, of a sudden found  
Nought, save the trampled bracken. Both were  
gone.

Marvelling much, he left the woods, and came  
To a great Castle by the bare sea-shore.  
But neither sight, nor sound, nor good salt smell  
Had he to guide him, till he cross'd the dunes ;  
For the milk-handed mist had tamed the sea,  
That, listless as lake water, on the strand  
Laid down her weak, wan waves, each one a sob.  
No hovering gull, no guillemot busy-wing'd,

## LEON

Rent the thick-webbed air ; the sharp black isles,  
The beacon Castle, were not ; close in shore,  
Dark bladderwrack, the strong tide's thrall, thrust  
    up  
Her million nodding and exultant heads ;  
Nothing else moved.

And now the clammy calm,  
The waves' gasp, and the stealthy swathing mist,  
Wrought upon Leon like the sense of Death.  
He paus'd upon the midway sand, secrete,  
Alone ; in the dim silence Morgan's words  
Burst lurid on his mind, a sinister glare,  
And lit the one thought—Death.

“Fool ! fool !” he cried ;  
A savage laughter took him. “From the sea  
Love was to rise ? Out of the sea, forsooth,  
My bride was coming ? Oh, a fair conceit,  
Kind Queen ! a riddle plain to rede ! Ay, thee,  
Rising at last to rid me of life's hate,



## LEON

Thee see I clear, thee speak I loud, thee,—Death!  
‘Bow low?’ Yea! even to the ocean-floor,  
Where wait high nuptials with a fair bride—Death!  
Give ye good welcome, O most royal bride!  
Ah, Venus! ah, sweet guerdon from the sea,  
Gramercy!” (and he hirpled down the sand),  
“Gramercy!”

Thereupon, the mist, with voice  
Near and outringing, toss’d an answer back,  
“Who cries Gramercy?”

Leon’s heart stood still.  
Who spoke? Or can the mist find words, and  
speak?  
“Who cries Gramercy?” At this second call,  
Remembering Death, he answer’d listlessly,  
“I, Leon, son of Ector.” Came the voice:  
“Wait, Leon, son of Ector! Wait for me!”  
So there he stay’d; for Morgan’s glozing words

## LEON

Held honey yet ; the voice was not a man's,  
And he began to wonder if the fog  
Held very Venus with some royal maid.  
At such fair prospect, Death he clean forgot,  
And on the hard, wet sand abiding, peer'd  
Hither and thither. By-and-by, a swell  
Of glossy water quell'd the bladderwrack,  
With a loud sudden splash striking the shore ;  
But scarce he heard it, for this time the voice  
Cried almost at his ear : " Ho ! Ector's son,  
Where art thou ? " And with widening eyes, he  
said,  
" Here, Queen ! "

Mocking she laugh'd, mocking she look'd,  
Face to his face, and breath upon his cheek—  
No Venus, no, nor queen, but a fish-girl  
Brown and bare-neck'd, with ankles in the sea.  
Her girded dress, bright limbs, and heavy hair,  
That, dark and gleaming like sea-ribbon, clung

## LEON

Round her wet, laughter-quaking throat—all these  
Breathed out the sea's own breath of pungent  
brine.

“Leon, good son of Ector! what dost here?  
Mercy! the dolorous look! Oh, hie thee hence,  
And sit thee by the fagot! For I swear  
By mine own heart, the which thou makest ache  
With laughter at such sourness, never once  
Saw I a knight less worthy of my sea,  
Mother of every health, the live strong sea!”

She stopp'd; her loosen'd laughter came again,  
Curdling the milky air, and by his cheek  
Drove the thin mist with brush of chilly wings.  
Till, perching both bare arms upon a rock  
Like two bright stems to prop that salt sea-flower  
Her pointed face, she pucker'd up her lips  
To keep them still, and stood regarding him.

But Leon had no spirit to be moved—

## LEON

Hazy despair had wrapt him like a fog,  
Dull acquiescence calm'd all impulses.  
"Damsel!" he said, "half in my heart it were  
To wish your face as dolorous, if thro' that  
Such wine of laughter might but touch my lips.  
Nay, prithee!" (for her face grew grave), "laugh  
on,  
And, in a little, tell me of thy name."

"Riance!" quoth she: "Dark Riance is my  
name;

I have it of my laughter. But, fair Sir,  
What do you on my marches? Lack you crabs  
Or spotted jellies, limpets, cloudy shrimps—  
Or had you but a mind to taste my fog?  
Good wholesome cheer for heart and stomach both,  
And yet meseems you do not thrive withal?"  
With that she smiled, a very vexing smile.

"Nay, child," he said; "Reserve for fishermen

## LEON

Thy lavish wealth ; but I am none. My nets  
Were spread for spoil far richer."

"What is that?

Will it content you? For my father seeks,  
He says, a richer spoil, honours and lands,  
And never hath eno'; I in my Sea  
Find rich contentment. Will your spoil suffice?"  
"Ay! for 'tis Death!" he said.

At that dark word,  
Flat fell her cheek as the undimpled waves.  
Leon himself, at something in her look,  
Shrank from the dismal thought. Now first it  
seem'd

Harsher to die than live, nay, life was sweet,  
Death terrible. What sudden rising sun  
Made such a sharp division, light from dark,  
Dawn on his twilight spirit?

## LEON

“Must it be?”

The words brake from him: “Death? Oh, horrible,

Impossible!” A doubtful hope flash’d up:

“Perchance not Death she meant! Perchance I err’d!

I *will* not die!”

At once the fish-girl’s face

Quicken’d; at once he felt the doubt decrease!

“Pray you,” he cried, “all japeries apart,

Saw you at any time from out this sea

A fair Queen rising, wondrous fair! and bright

Like foam upon the waters are her feet—

Know you of such?” But Riance shook her head,

And spake not. Loath to lose the sudden hope,

“Your folk,” he urged, “may give her some sea-name,

‘Queen of the Sea,’ or ‘Lady of the Sea;’

## LEON

Know you none such?" She hung her head,  
her cheeks

Grew rosy—why? "I have seen one," she said,  
"That hath a curious love to play among  
The merry wavelets, hangeth on their necks—  
And I have seen bright foam beneath her feet.

If it be she you mean, she is not near  
So bright and fair as foam is; but, in sooth,  
Folk call her Maid, and Lady, of the Sea."  
Here she peep'd sidelong at him, like a bird,  
As if in doubt; but all his doubts were gone.

"O ignorant!" he cried, "do ye not know  
Whom ye have seen? But I know! Blessed words!  
Not Death, not Death, not Death! O gentle maid,  
That Queen I seek; pray lead me where she is;  
And Heaven reward thee with undazzled sight!"

"Wherefore? What would'st thou with her?"  
Riance ask'd,

And ey'd him much askance, but did not laugh.  
He, seeing speedy haven for his hopes

## LEON

With wind of so fair promise, answer'd quick,  
"Worship I owe her, and a boon beside  
Have I to beg."

"What is your boon?"

"Fair maid,  
Have done with teasing! Prithee, show me her!  
The boon imports thee nothing."

"How, fair Sir!  
How should I grant it, then? Down on your  
knees!

I thought in kindness to award the boon,  
Waiving the worship. Since you will not—why,  
Long worship scarce will win that boon, methinks!"

O treacherous wind! What hidden reef was this?  
Was it the mist wrought so bewilderingly?  
He stood confused. But Riance chirrup'd on,  
Flouting, and fleering, yet in all her ways  
Sweet as a wagtail on the briny beach:



## LEON

“So slow of courtesy, Sir Dolorous-Face?  
Art doubtful? Why, me was it not you sought,  
Me, they call Maid, and Lady, of the Sea?  
Art dainty? Are my trickling sands too hard?  
Nay, but thy knees, forsooth, too proud! Kneel,  
kneel!  
Bow low, do worship! Then—who knows? The  
boon. . . .”

What with the weltering mist, that of her form  
Made something formless, something weird and  
vague,

Continually drifting, yet unmoved:  
What with her mockery, and some blurred shame  
Felt in his tangled mind: as a sick man  
Resigns his peevish and self-thwarting will  
With tacit pleasure to his resolute nurse,  
So Leon was reliev'd at her behest,  
And knelt.

Now Riance, while she spake with him,

## LEON

Both for the fog, and the upsloping sand,  
Saw not his hurt; but when he came to kneel  
He did it hardly, and she, coming close,  
Found that his side was maim'd; and when she  
mark'd

His cavern'd eyes and miserable mouth,  
And the deep furrows by the plough of Pain  
Dug out on cheek and youthful forehead, then  
Her tender heart rebuked her, slow great tears  
Well'd in her innocent eyes, and from the breast  
Whence the wild laughter leapt but now, a sob,  
A long, deep sob, came bursting. And he took  
Her sea-stain'd hand to kiss it, but she snatch'd  
The fingers from him, and she fell and wept  
Heart-broken on the sand. No Venus, she!

But Leon, thinking that she had but slipp'd  
On weed or slimy stones, crawl'd to her side;  
Lifted her, not with ease, for he was lame,  
And rose, supporting her; and she look'd up—

## LEON

At him she look'd, and straightway hid her face,  
For she that wont to laugh was weeping now,  
And she that mock'd him clung about his neck.

Then he, maim'd Leon, that had never felt  
Anything nestle to him, needing him,  
Thought nothing more of Venus, nothing more  
Of Morgan and her promise, nothing more  
Of anything save Riance; rais'd her head,  
And on the mist-wet, sea-wet, tear-wet face  
Press'd passionate kisses, born of gratitude  
And love.

And Riance, comforted, said, "Leon,  
Forgive me! Tell me, who is it ye seek?  
For I will help your quest." But he cried out:  
"Venus I sought, and a king's daughter; now  
I seek them not!"

"No Venus do I know;  
"She dwells not here," quoth Riance, much perplex'd.

# LEON

"King Lamorake is my father, and, save him,  
Here is no King."

As the thick fog is blown  
To tatters by strong wind, and leaves clear air,  
Her words brought light at last to Leon. "Oh,  
Out of the sea," he cried, "in very truth  
Is risen the Queen of Love and Loveliness,  
Out of the sea my Queen! And I will bow  
Low as the grave; yea, I will beg so loud  
The stars at noon shall hear me, if thereby  
The promise sweetly closing-in thy strain,  
Wizard! ring rhymes with Truth. If it prove so,  
Oh, then, be blessed! Oh, then, not for Death—  
For Life, for Life, Gramercy!"

As he spake,  
Leon the dolorous laugh'd, and with him laugh'd  
Riance, her eyes tear-bright. And well he spake;  
For they two loved together all life long.





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